# THE MENTOR

Vol. 1 No. 20

## MAKERS OF AMERICAN HUMOR

JOSH BILLINGS JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS
ARTEMUS WARD FRANK R. STOCKTON
BILL NYE MARK TWAIN

*By BURGES JOHNSON*

A FIB of colossal proportions, a lie so enormous that it flaunts and scorns belief, has amused Americans ever since there has been any such thing as a national temperament this side the water. If the assertion be made in sedate and solemn fashion, so much the funnier.

Analyzing humor is like dissecting a butterfly; but it is safe to say this much,—that exaggeration has been a chief ingredient of all American humor, and has always distinguished it from European products. British audiences gazed in amazement at a hesitating young American lecturer who asserted shyly and gravely that Brigham Young had one hundred and eighty wives, and that it took him three days to kiss them all. They listened until amazement had given place to merriment—and Artemus Ward had won a triumph.

The first American humorous writers appeared not many years ago. We do not find a school of American literature of any kind in the early years of the republic; and as the men of those days had little time for writing, because there was the work of nation building to be done, it would seem as though the early writers had less time for laughter.

In the years just before the Civil War we began, as a people, to find a little more time for the study of ourselves. We had developed a national sensitiveness toward outside criticism, and a personal pride as Americans. At the same time Providence sent us our first humorous writers as a safeguard against too great self-satisfaction.

These men found plenty of material ready to hand. The country was raw and undeveloped, there was comparatively little traveling among the sections, and each corner of the land had its native type, with peculiarities that amused the provincial inhabitants of another section. Of the men who wrote at least a decade before the war, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, George Horatio Derby, William Tappan Thompson, and others described the life of their rural neighbors in the South, while Seba Smith, Frederick Swartwout Cozzens in the "Sparrowgrass Papers," Mrs. Frances Miriam Whitcher as the "Widow Bedott," and many more taught their own neighbors of the North to see themselves as others might see them,—and laugh about it.

## EARLY "SLAPSTICK" HUMOR

This early period of American humorous literature might with all due respect be called the day of the slapstick, as it was the day of blunt tools in so many directions of national activity. Politics was played with a club, caricature was brutal, oratory was flamboyant, and to the more sensitive taste of today the humor of that period lacked subtlety.

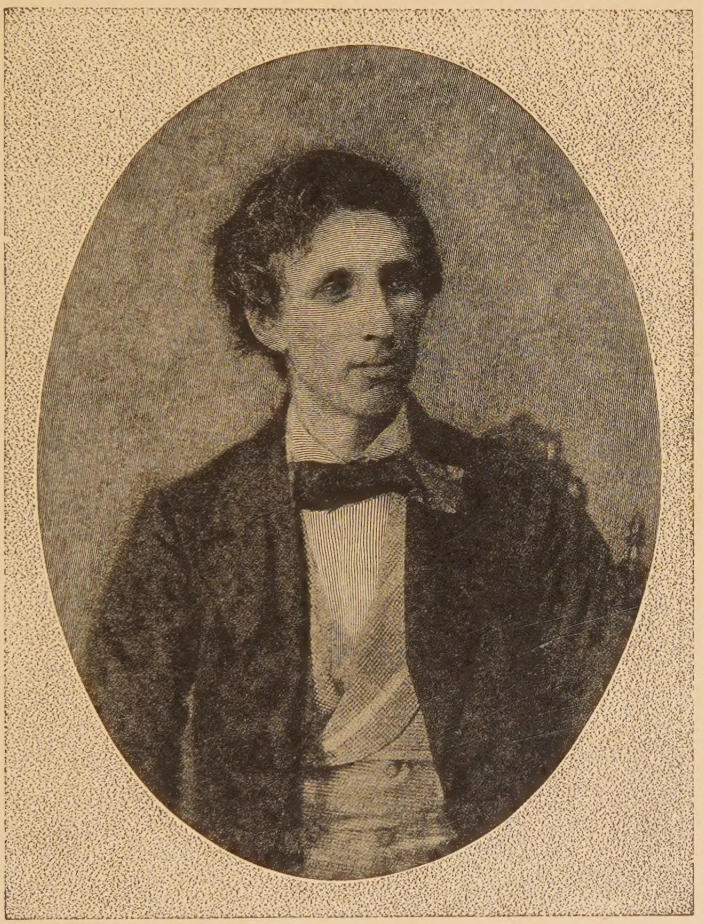
Among the tricks of the humorous writer's trade at that time—the habit deserves no more dignified phrase—was the use of grotesque spelling. Perhaps this was a half-conscious effort to create a crude national dialect caricaturing a widespread slovenliness of speech. At any rate, it characterized the professionally humorous writers of the wartime. Bad spelling served as a sort of helpful announcement, as though the writer said: "What I now tell you is intended to be funny: do not read it seriously."

## JOSH BILLINGS, THE PHILOSOPHIC

Head and shoulders above most of his fellow writers of that day stood "Josh Billings," born Henry Wheeler Shaw. Test almost any of his epigrams by translation into pure English and correct spelling, and the fun is there. "There is no man so poor but what he can afford to keep one dog, and I have seen them so poor that they could afford to keep three," is a sentiment that does not gain its accuracy or any other quality from the spelling. "Truth is sed to be stranger than fickshun it is to most pholks," is a characteristic bit of his philosophy.

Henry Wheeler Shaw was born at Lanesborough, Massachusetts, in 1818; he died at Monterey, California, in 1885. The life of remarkable variety that crowded those years is worthy of notice, because it parallels the lives of so many of our other humorists. If there were space in this article to analyze closely our distinctive American humor,—to go behind the returns, in other words,—we should find utmost significance in the

fact that Billings and Nye and Ward and Lanigan and Stockton and Twain and a score of others were rolling stones in their business affairs, or Jacks of all trades, rubbing elbows at one time or another with men of every rank and variety.



From a photograph made and lent by James F. Ryder, taken about 1857

**ARTEMUS WARD**

*A Master of American Humor.*

Shaw entered Hamilton College; but left before graduation to take up a roving life in the West. He was successively farmer, steamboat captain, and real estate agent. In 1858 he returned to New York and became an auctioneer in Poughkeepsie, at the same time beginning to write for newspapers and magazines. For ten years he published annually

his "Farmer's Allminax," a delightful travesty upon the serious almanacs then current; but filled with shrewd wisdom that reminds one of that first great American gazetteer, "Poor Richard." "Josh Billings, His Sayings," and "Every boddy's Friend" were among his most widely popular books.

In discussing our early humorists there is little space here for those who obviously gained inspiration from British models. Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber was one of these, and John Godfrey Saxe was another. The former's "Mrs. Partington," an American Mrs. Malaprop, is good reading today; and the latter owes to Thomas Hood a muse that still excites our laughter. Nor should we do more than mention in passing Washington Irving and Lowell and Holmes, or any of the founders of our literature. They are among our greatest humorists; but their names belong elsewhere. We like to think that humor was an inevitable part of their greatness because they were Americans.

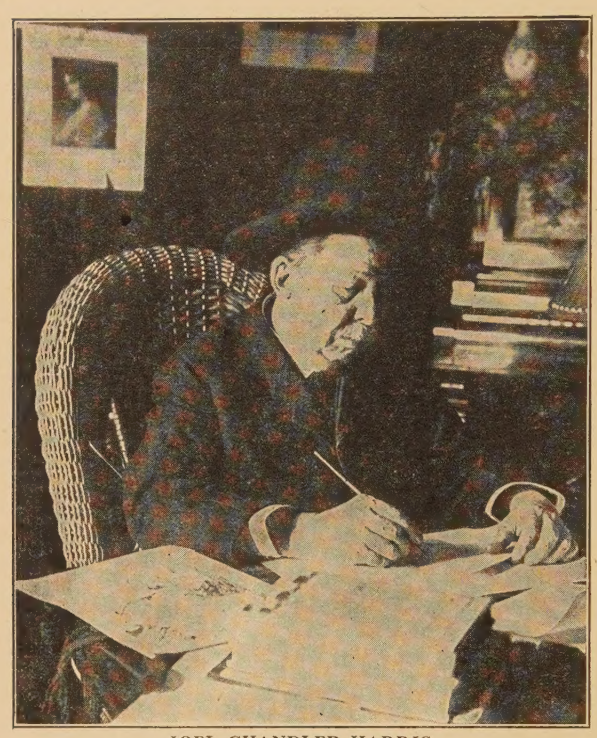
## ARTEMUS WARD, THE ORIGINAL

The man who perhaps first drew Old World attention to a New World school of humor was Charles Farrar Browne, universally known as "Artemus Ward." Born later than Josh Billings, at Waterford, Maine, in 1834, and dying when yet a young man, in Southampton, England, in 1867, his fame was more widely heralded than that of Shaw. He too roamed from one end of the land to the other, as a journeyman printer. He too rejoiced in a wonderful "fonetic" spelling. And both men, as they came to depend upon their humor as a source of livelihood, took to the lecture platform. The presentday reader may wonder that Artemus Ward should ever have gained the wider vogue. But his charm of personality and the fact that he gave first place to his lectures, afterward publishing them in book form, may account for this in great measure. It is said that all who saw and heard him delighted in him; and this was specially true of the British public, which seemed stunned at first by the utter extravagance of his humor, then flocked to his lectures in delighted crowds. His letters to "Punch" (the first American contributions, by the way, to that august journal) were enjoyed throughout England. Once taken to the British bosom, he might jibe at the Tower, and joke in Stratford-on-Avon, and his very daring added to his success. Writing to "Punch" about his visit to the Tower of London, he says, "A Warder now took us in charge, and showed us the Trater's Gate, the armers, and things. The Trater's Gate is wide enuff to admit about twenty traters abrest, I should jedge; but beyond this, I couldn't see that it was superior to gates in ginral. Traters, I will here remark, are a onfortnit class of people. If they wasn't, they wouldn't be traters. They conspire to bust up a coun-

From a photograph lent by Robinson Locke. Halftone plate engraved by F. H. Wellington.

**PETROLEUM V. NASBY, MARK TWAIN, AND JOSH BILLINGS**

*Three writers who made us laugh with them.*



JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS
*"Uncle Remus" at work in his study.*

try,—they fail, and they're traters. They bust her, and they become statesmen and heroes."

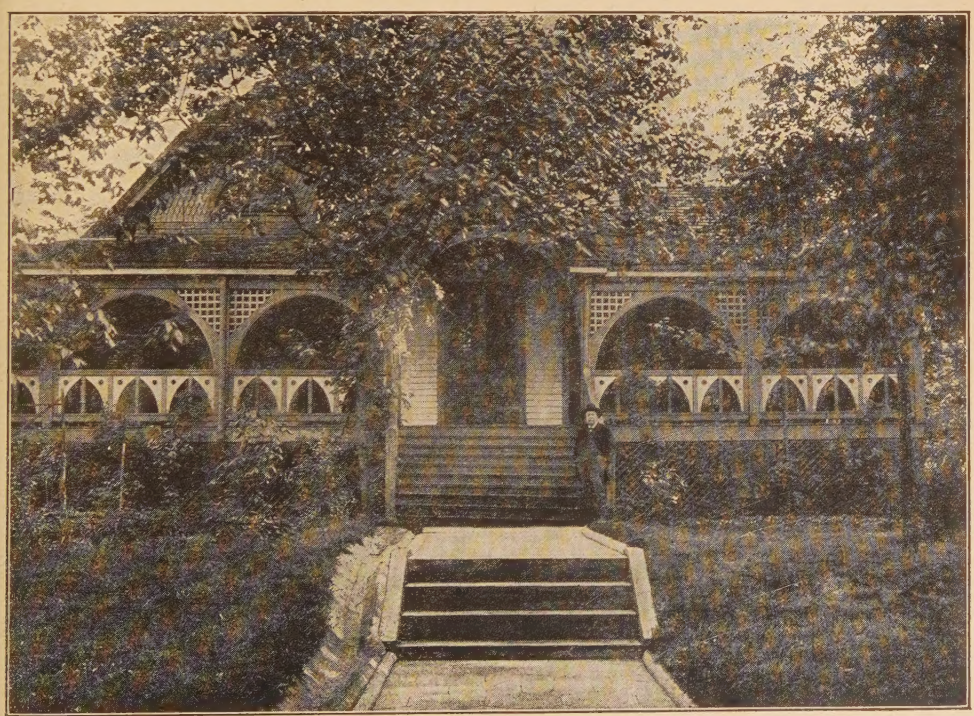
Mr. Browne took delight in referring to himself as a showman. Next to his famous lecture on his visit to the Mormons, his descriptions of the animals in his traveling show won greatest popular success.

It is easy to group many of the writings of our nineteenth century humorists in the slapstick school, while at the same time one may hesitate to apply the term to the individuals who produced it. Almost without exception each one of them wandered in and out of other fields, or often in his most boisterous moments wrote with some serious underlying motive. David R. Locke, writing under the name of "Petroleum V. Nasby," not only delighted President Lincoln and brought him needed relaxation of mind, but was of great assistance to the Northern cause. Robert Henry Newell, as "Orpheus C. Kerr," wrote in the same vein, while Charles Henry Smith, as "Bill Arp," similarly served the Confederacy. These, and many others whose names deserve equal mention, we find hard to read at length today, with their weird spelling, their vociferous humor, and often with a vein of coarseness that was characteristic of the period rather than of the individual.

## BILL NYE AND NEWSPAPER HUMORISTS

One writer in particular, Bill Nye, deserves special mention here because he carried that earlier school of humor over into the present day; his hilarious wit and his delightful exaggeration have grouped him with Ward and Billings and Nasby, while he belongs in point of time with that later group of men developed by the newspapers, such as James Montgomery Bailey ("The Danbury News Man"), Robert J. Burdette of

the "Burlington Hawkeye," Charles Bertram Lewis ("M. Quad") of the "Detroit Free Press," Charles Heber Clark ("Max Adeler"), and several others. Edgar W. Nye was born at Shirley, Maine, in 1850, and died near Asheville, North Carolina, in 1896. He too rubbed elbows with men of every section in his variety of occupations, and in company with James Whitcomb Riley faced large audiences from the lecture platform. His published works were many, some so recent that the test of time lends little aid to our judgment. "Bill Nye and the Boomerang," "A Comic History of the United States," and "The Railroad Guide" are still fresh in the memories of many readers. At his best he fully equals Josh Billings; but he lacks that underlying philosophy that has led critics to liken the latter to La Rochefoucauld. "You can stimulate your hair," says Nye, "by using castor oil three ounces, brandy one ounce. Put the oil on the sewing machine, and absorb the brandy between meals. The brandy will no doubt fly right to your head, and either greatly assist your hair or it will reconcile you to your lot. If you wish, you may drink the brandy and then breathe hard on the scalp. This will be difficult at first; but after awhile it will not seem irksome."



THE HOME OF "UNCLE REMUS" IN ATLANTA

From a photograph by Van der Weyde, London, lent by James Whitcomb Riley

BILL NYE
*Famous for his witty epigrams.*

Perhaps as an epigrammist Bill Nye will be best remembered. His remark that he had become convinced that Wagner's music "is not half as bad as it sounds" touched a sympathetic chord in the hearts of many; and there is pleasant philosophy in his assertion, "As far as I am concerned, individually, I could worry along someway if we didn't have a phenomenon in the house from one year's end to another."

There is a quieter school of writers who have not only made us laugh, but have done a service to literature in preserving the dialect and manners and customs of out-of-the-way corners. The humor of Bret Harte belongs in this group, and of James Whitcomb Riley, and George W. Cable, and a hundred of greater or less fame.

## THE AUTHOR OF "UNCLE REMUS"

One among them, Joel Chandler Harris, stands out as an American humorist who has performed a lasting service to literature and to the science of folklore by reason of his Uncle Remus stories. Joel Chandler Harris was born at Eatonton, Georgia, in 1848, and died at Atlanta in 1908. Like many others whose names have found place here, he was a printer by trade. Later he became a journalist, and finally editor of the "Atlanta Constitution." In 1880 he published a book entitled "Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings," intending it to be a serious contribution to Afro-American folk lore. He awoke next morning, as the saying is, to find himself hailed as a humorous author, with an audience worldwide. Today those stories, and the many others that followed, have a permanent place in literature. "Nights with Uncle Remus," "Mingo and Other Sketches," and "Daddy Jake, the Runaway," appeal to children and their elders, not because they are an accurate portrayal of the true Southern darky, but because of the unadulterated enjoyment they afford.

## FRANK R. STOCKTON'S WIDE RANGE

A wider field of amusing human nature was exploited by Frank R. Stockton, who might properly have been mentioned with Bret Harte and others who have contributed so largely to literature outside the realm of humor. And yet his fantastic fairy stories for children and his inimitable

**MARK TWAIN**

*An interesting photograph of the great humorist, taken at Tuxedo Park.*

"Rudder Grange" compel a notice in this article. His humor was quiet rather than extravagant, but the characters he introduces, and the fantasy of plot in his stories, mark him as distinctively American. He was born in Philadelphia in 1834, and died in 1902. He began life as an engraver; but later devoted himself to journalism. American children who read the "St. Nicholas" magazine felt a love for him that seemed somehow to attach itself to his personality, as though they saw the gentle-natured man himself behind "The Floating Prince," and "The Bee-Man of Orn," and other stories that they awaited so eagerly.

## MARK TWAIN, PRINCE OF HUMORISTS

A study of our American humor carries one over but a short period of years when all is said. And it seems as though a glance at each phase of American humor helps us to consider the writings of that prince of them all, Mark Twain, and appreciate the wide range of his humor and the depth of his philosophy. He was born at Florida, Missouri, in 1835, and his boyhood, spent in the neighboring town of Hannibal, acquainted him with the varied types of humanity that throve along the Mississippi River in the "flush times" of steamboating. Samuel Langhorne Clemens he was baptized; but the pen name that he later selected from the terminology of steamboat piloting supersedes any other in the minds and hearts of the reading world.

Mark Twain too learned the trade of printer; afterward he achieved his boyhood ambition and became a river pilot; and the list of his later occupations and wanderings, until he settled down to the serious business of writing, compares in length to that of Josh Billings and Artemus Ward. He was prospector and newspaper editor in the gold fields of Nevada; was reporter in San Francisco, soldier for a short time in the war, and lecturer throughout the United States. He too rubbed elbows with every type of fellow citizen, and his shrewd and searching humor made "copy" of them all. Just as his life in those early days paralleled closely the lives of some of the wartime humorists, so did his first writings partake of their boisterous style, their untrammeled exaggeration, and often their coarseness. But his genius broadened with his years, and as his knowledge of human nature increased he developed a searching insight and a kindly philosophy that make it impossible to associate his name with any single group. When the present generation has forgotten the laughter that he evoked, it is hard to say which of his writings will determine the place he will occupy. Perhaps those stories of his own boyhood life, "Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," with wide appeal to youth and age, will be the determining factors; or "The Inno-

From a photograph by Hollinger Adv. Co.

**F. P. DUNNE**

*The creator of "Mr. Dooley."*

From a photograph by Brock

**GEORGE ADE**

*Whose "Fables in Slang" have brought him fame.*

cents Abroad," "A Tramp Abroad," and others of his farcical writings, despite their wealth of fact or philosophy, will leave him distinctively among the humorists. Perhaps "The Prince and the Pauper" and "The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc" will find another niche for his fame. We of today—for he was so lately among us—honor him for all and leave the question of relative merit in his works to be settled at another time. Hardly another American writer of any day won, during his lifetime, such worldwide recognition. American universities, and Oxford as well, delighted to honor him with degrees, and his friends were myriad.

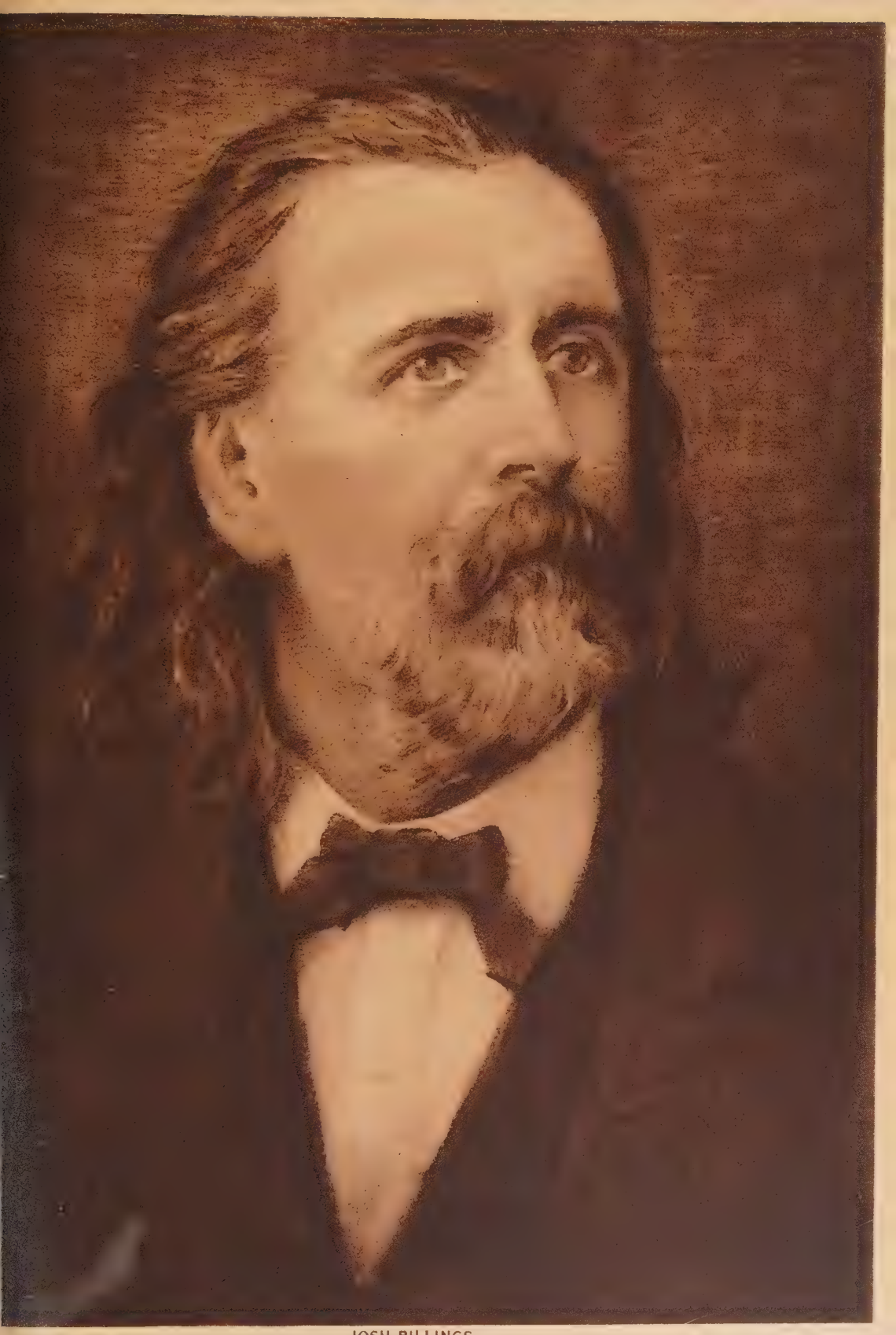
It is not wise, in such a study as this, to consider the work of men now living, who are still in the fullness of their powers. George Ade and "Peter Dooley," Irving Bacheller, John Kendrick Bangs, Oliver Herford, Gelett Burgess, Ellis Parker Butler, Wallace Irwin, and a score of other presentday humorists are contributing something to American literature that will place their names finally in some other category. We mention them and their group at this time merely as a tribute of gratitude to them all for keeping the flame of American humor so brightly burning.

# Taste and Knowledge

TASTE begins where knowledge leaves off. A wealth of knowledge may be impaired by a poverty of taste. Knowledge exposes facts; taste clothes and graces them. Knowledge comprehends all qualities, good and bad; taste picks and chooses qualities. Knowledge makes and molds the potter's clay; taste determines the vase's charm. Taste has been called the flower of knowledge. It does not grow by knowledge, but by cultivation—and with the growth of knowledge the responsibility of taste increases.

TASTE and eloquence," as Edmund Burke has said, "are considered among the smaller and secondary morals, but they are of no mean importance in the ordering of life. Taste may not force anyone to turn vice into virtue, but it at least recommends virtue by giving it something of the blandishments of pleasure."

TASTE, if it means anything but a paltry connoisseurship," insists Carlyle, "must mean a general susceptibility to truth and nobleness, a sense to discern, and a heart to love and reverence all beauty, order, goodness, wheresoever, or in whatsoever forms and accompaniments, they are to be seen. This surely implies, as its chief condition, a finely gifted mind, purified into harmony with itself, into keenness and justice of vision; above all, kindled into love and generous admiration."



JOSH BILLINGS

ONE

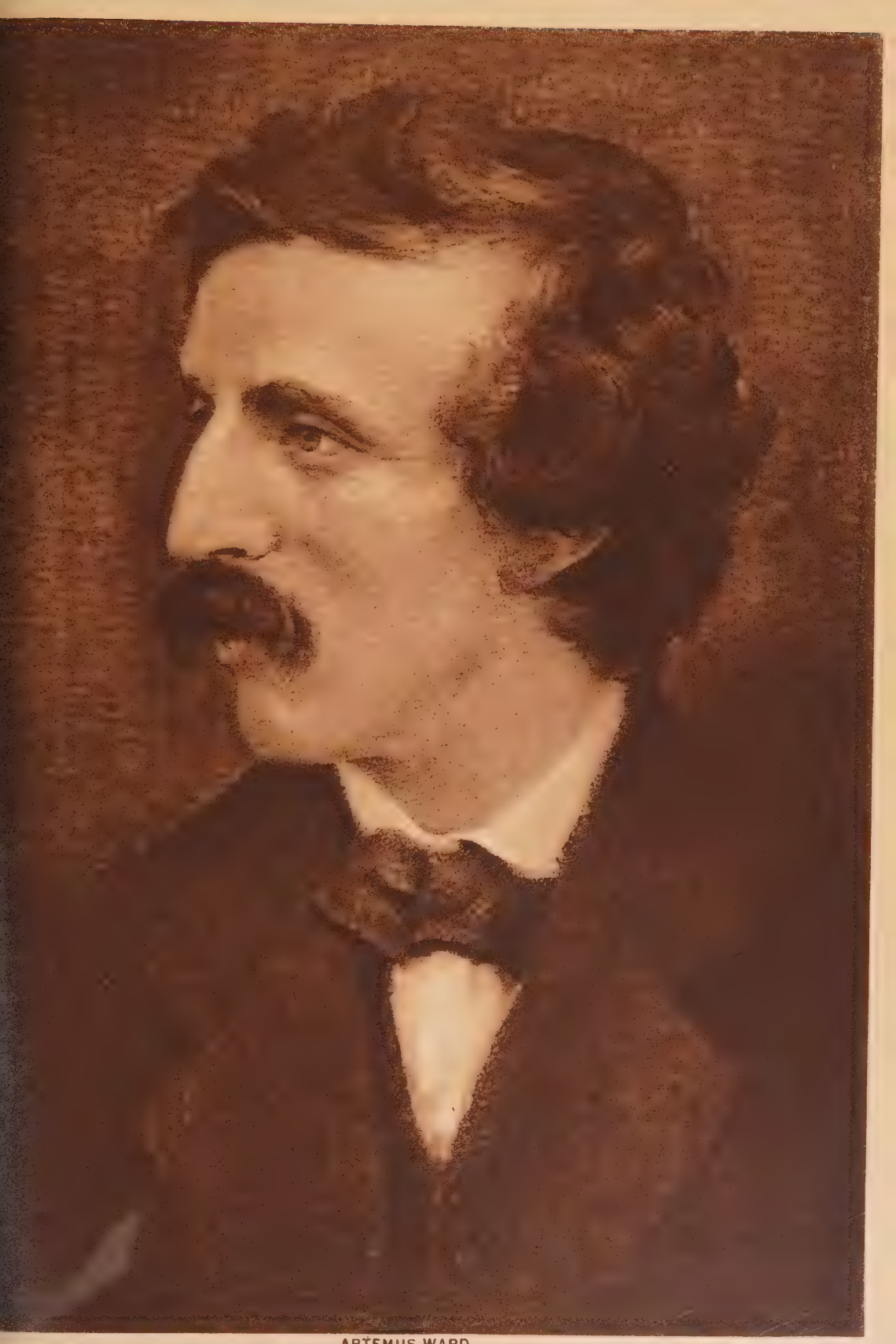
IT is said of Josh Billings (Henry Wheeler Shaw) that his first writings did not win wide attention, but that after he changed his spelling the American public began to "take notice," and soon his popularity as a humorist was great. When he was writing regularly for the *Century Magazine*, under the title "Uncle Esek's Wisdom," Dr. J. G. Holland, then editor, insisted upon printing his epigrams in correct fashion. Mr. Shaw accepted the mandate, but continued to compose his contributions in his own peculiar misspelled way.

Like most of the early American humorists, Josh Billings was a Jack-of-all-trades. He tried college life, but gave it up before completing a course at Hamilton College. He was successively farmer, steamboat captain, real estate agent, and auctioneer. This latter pursuit he followed in Poughkeepsie, New York. He was born in Lanesborough, Massachusetts, on April 21, 1818; but his wanderings carried him West and back again, and finally he died in Monterey, California, on October 14, 1885. Much of his later wandering was due to the fact that he took to the lecture platform and there achieved considerable success. Mark Twain was one of his associates in his lecturing days.

In the quality of their humor, Mark Twain in his earlier writings and Josh Billings had much in common. Extravagance of statement and radical absurdity of ideas were the chief constituents of their output. "I am too old and too respektable to be a phool ennymore," said Josh. And the American public of his day placed confidence in his consistent extravagance of assertion and gladly refused to believe him!

Many of the humorists of the wartime period resorted to the trick of queer spelling, and as we translate their writings into ordinary speech today we are likely to find little left that amuses us. But Josh Billings can stand translation. His epigrams are always good, and there is a vein of philosophy underlying his humor that is true to any age. In this he often reminds us of that first American humorist, Benjamin Franklin, and, like Franklin, Billings created an almanac that ran for several years and was crowded with fun and philosophy so thoroughly mixed that the reader could not tell where one left off and the other began. Listen to his description of laughter: "Anatomikally konsidered, laffing iz the sensation ov pheeling good all over, and showing it principally in one spot. Morally konsidered, it iz the next best thing tew the 10 commandments. Theoretikally konsidered, it kan out-argy all the logik in existence. Pyroteknikally konsidered, it is the fireworks of the soul. But i don't intend this essa for laffing in the lump, but for laffing on the half-shell."

PREPARED BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF THE MENTOR ASSOCIATION
ILLUSTRATION FOR THE MENTOR, VOL. 1, No. 20, SERIAL No. 20



ARTEMUS WARD

ABOUT fifty years ago a slender, modest appearing man edged his way hesitatingly out upon a London lecture platform before a large audience of phlegmatic Britishers, and with every evidence of failing courage and embarrassment proceeded to poke fun at the Tower of London and every cherished British tradition. This was Artemus Ward. His winning personality and the contrast between his apparent shyness and the extravagance of his statements won him instant success in England. They loved him for his "nerve," and they took to the quality of his humor, which in its boisterousness and absurd exaggeration was distinctively American.

Artemus Ward (Charles Farrar Browne) was the first American contributor to London *Punch;* he wrote that periodical many letters which were read with delight throughout England. In fact, his success abroad was much greater than any he had achieved at home, and there was tragedy in his death, which came very soon after he began his work in England, and just as he was reaping some reward for many years of struggle. For Browne was like most of our other early humorists, in that he was a rolling stone.

Artemus Ward, like Josh Billings and many other contemporaries, developed an extravagant system of spelling. As we of this generation attempt to read his works at any length, we find less to amuse us than in the writings of Josh Billings, for instance. He lacked the undercurrent of philosophy that Josh Billings possessed. Yet his fame in his own day was greater than that of Billings.

Charles Farrar Browne was born in Waterford, Maine, on April 26, 1834, and died in Southampton, England, on March 6, 1867. By trade he was a journeyman printer, and traveled from one end of the land to the other following his trade. The true humorist must of necessity have a wide knowledge of human nature, and these early American humorists were given great opportunity to meet and study odd types of humanity in the many corners of our new nation in the days before the Civil War.

Artemus Ward loved to refer to himself as a showman. Next to his famous lecture on his visit to the Mormons, his descriptions of his traveling show won the greatest popular success. "My show at present consists of three moral Bares and a Kangaroo (a amoosin little Raskal—'twould make you larf yourself to deth to see the little cuss jump up and squeal)," he writes to a country editor, and in the same letter he adds, "I am anxyus to skewer your inflooence. I repeat in regard to them hanbills that I shall git em struck orf up to your printin office. My perlitercal sentiments agree with yours exactly. I know they do, becawz I never saw a man whoos didn't. Respectively yures, A. Ward. P. S. You scratch my back & Ile scratch your back."

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BILL NYE

THREE

AN original and amusing letter of resignation, written in his capacity as postmaster of Laramie, Wyoming, to President Arthur, first brought Bill Nye (Edgar Wilson Nye) to public notice. Somehow a copy of this letter escaped from the President's files, and, as Nye says, "was copied from Japan to South Africa and from Beersheba to a given point." Bill Nye disproves the assertion that a reputation as a humorist will keep a man out of public office. In addition to the postmastership at Laramie he was justice of the peace for six years, and might have held other offices within the gift of the community had he so wished.

Edgar Wilson Nye was born at Shirley, near Moosehead Lake, at the northern end of Maine, on August 25, 1850. When he was two years old his parents moved to St. Croix County in northern Wisconsin, and he there received a thorough common school education. He chose the law for a profession, and was admitted to the bar; but chance brought him a position as reporter on an evening paper at Laramie City, Wyoming Territory. This work lasted for only a year. He then practised law for a time, and was elected justice of the peace and later postmaster.

Bill Nye was a busy, hard working writer. He probably made more money from his writings than any other humorist of his time, except of course Mark Twain. There was a time, however, when he received one dollar a column; but as he says, "the columns were short and the type large, and I was glad to get the dollar."

Nye tells of his family in his characteristic way. "Some of the Nyes claim to be of French extraction, and I have a cousin who says he is a descendant of Marshal Ney, that being the spelling of the family name in an early day. I had some curiosity a few years ago, and tried to learn all I could of this matter. I traced our people back to the European police courts, and even beyond that, discovering at last in France our Coat of Alms; but I lost it from the line where it was airing last summer."

Bill Nye was popular as a lecturer. He had a delightfully frank personality, and his simplicity of manner and hatred of sham won him a host of friends. Nye never wished to be considered a phenomenon. For some time James Whitcomb Riley and Bill Nye traveled together. It was an oddly mated team for the lecture platform and a highly successful combination.

In 1877, Nye married Clara Frances Smith. They had two sons and two daughters. On February 22, 1896, he died near Asheville, N. C. With his death there passed away the old school of American humor; for he had carried into this generation the style of absurd extravagance and exaggeration that was characteristic of Josh Billings, Artemus Ward, Orpheus C. Kerr, and the fun makers of wartime.

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JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS

FOUR

IT does not often happen that a man makes a serious contribution to scientific literature and finds it enthusiastically received by the reading public as a collection of humorous stories. This happened to Joel Chandler Harris, who wrote in 1880 a book entitled "Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings," knowing it to be an important contribution to the records of Afro-American folklore; but the reading public cared little for the accuracy in these portrayals of the American negro type, in comparison to their delight in the humor and charm of the stories themselves.

Our great American humorous writers in the past have done a varied service to literature and to the social structure of our nation. Some have attacked sham and fraud with the weapons of wit and caricature and have done lasting good. Some, like Petroleum V. Nasby and Orpheus C. Kerr, served the Northern cause in the Civil War and at the same time afforded rest and relaxation to Abraham Lincoln when his mind greatly needed it. Others have done a lasting service in preserving accurate pictures of quaint provincial types throughout America. Joel Chandler Harris is one of these. Many who are still writing, such as Irving Bacheller, George Ade, and others, perform the same valuable service. It is hard to call this important service a byproduct, and yet, after all, the laughter and enjoyment stimulated by their writings is perhaps the greatest service they can render.

Mr. Harris was born in Eatonton, Georgia, December 8, 1848, and died in Atlanta in 1908. Like so many other American humorists he was a printer by trade, later becoming a journalist. Unlike many of the others, however, he was no rolling stone, but lived his life in Georgia and rose high in his profession, becoming editor of the Atlanta *Constitution*. "Nights with Uncle Remus," "Mingo and Other Sketches," and "Daddy Jake, the Runaway" are among his best known books; but he was a constant contributor of prose and verse to the magazines. Young and old like his stories. "The Tar Baby" is a classic in juvenile literature.

Uncle Remus does not belong among the slapstick humorists, and yet his place among the makers of American humor is just as definite, and he belongs just as distinctly to American literature as they. Joel Chandler Harris belongs to our national life, and the distance between him and Josh Billings marks the scope of our native humor.

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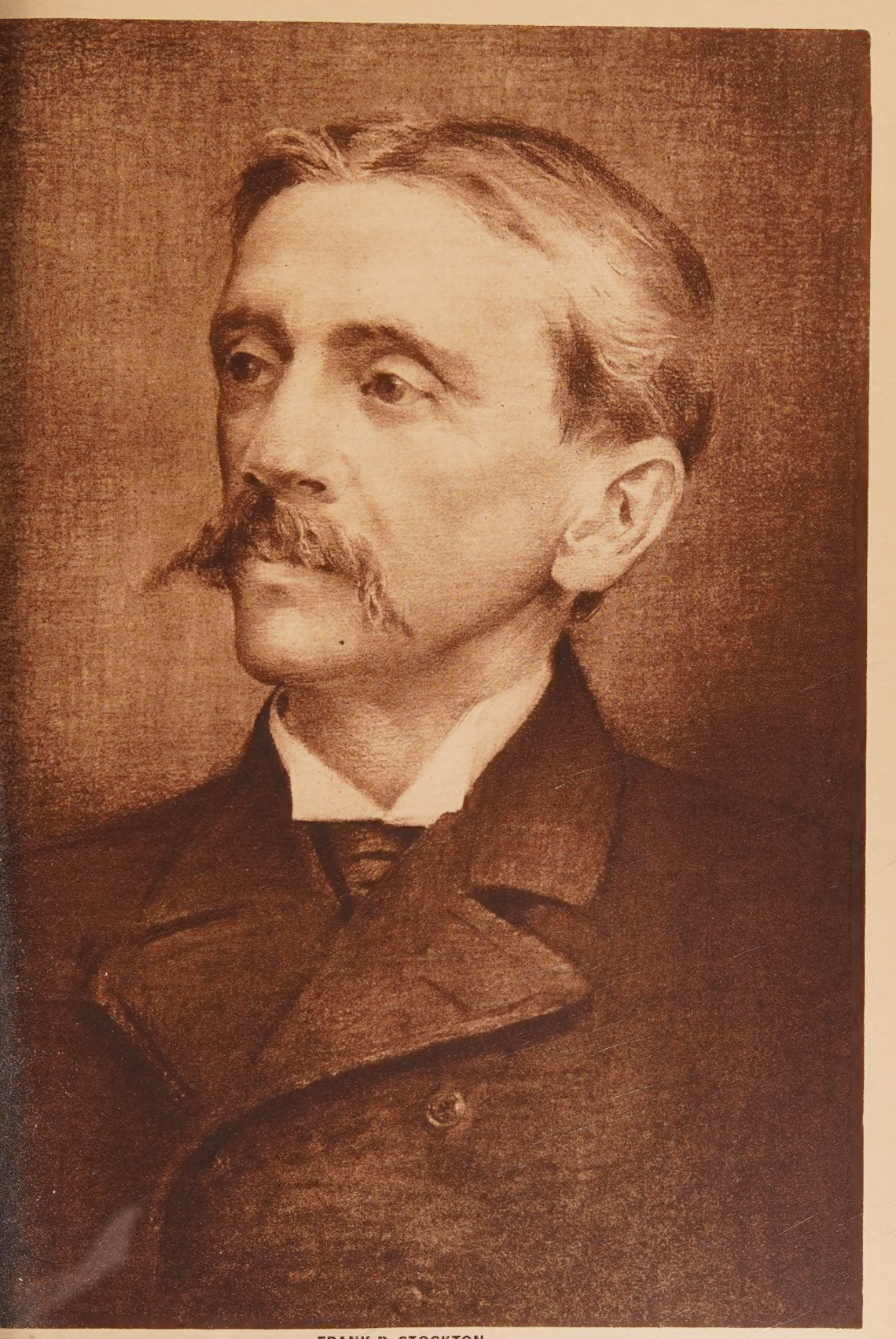


FRANK R. STOCKTON

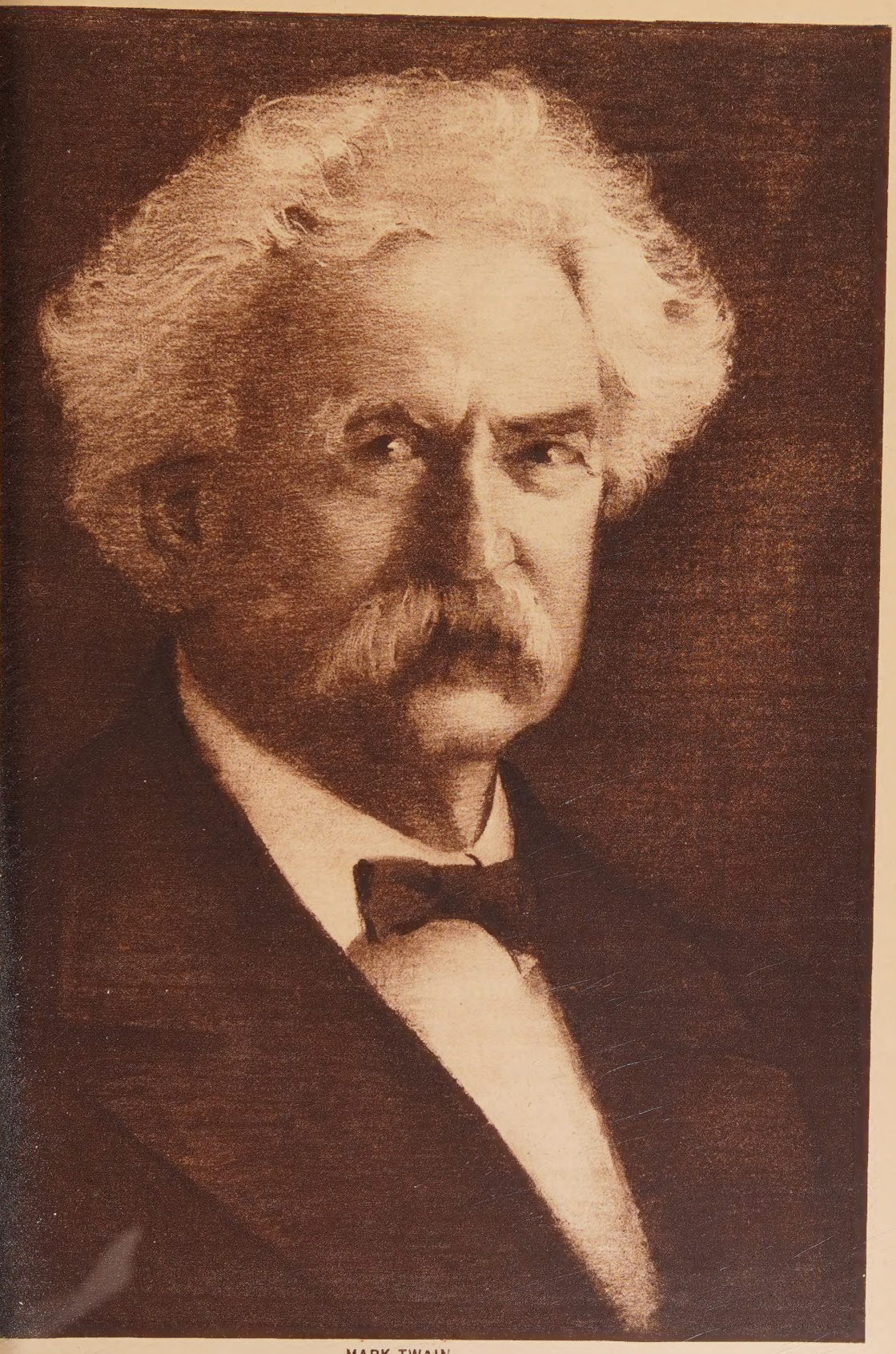
A GENERATION ago our mothers and fathers were asking whether it was the lady or the tiger? The question was illustrated and dramatized, cartooned and parodied. All this excitement arose from a single short story, written by a quiet, unassuming man, who had already begun to win attention as a story teller. "The Lady or the Tiger?" left its hero in a terrible predicament. A simple choice that faced him would either leave him face to face with a beautiful young lady or place him absolutely at the mercy of a devouring tiger—and there the story stopped. It was a practical joke that found a permanent place in American literature.

It is said that at a dinner once given to Frank R. Stockton, when the dessert was placed before the hostess, the amused guests saw two blocks of ice-cream, one modeled as a lady and the other as a tiger. There was tense silence when Stockton was asked which he would have, and he gravely replied, "A little of both, please."

Frank R. Stockton was born in Philadelphia on April 5, 1834, and died in Washington, D. C., April 20, 1902. He attended Philadelphia public schools, and his first vocation was that of wood engraver and designer. He made many illustrations for magazines that afterward sought his contributions as an author. His first employment was on a Philadelphia morning paper, and while he supported himself as an engraver he was constantly contributing short articles to his own and other papers. In 1872 he gave up designing to join the staff of the New York *Hearth and Home*. A year later he went over to *Scribner's Monthly* (now the *Century Magazine*), and in a very short time was made assistant editor of a new magazine for children that was then being established—the *St. Nicholas Magazine*. This position he filled until 1880.

Aside from certain famous novels, such as "Rudder Grange," which first brought Stockton into prominence in 1879, and "The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine," this author is at his best in his stories for children. His humor is no less distinctively American than that of Josh Billings and Artemus Ward and others of the slapstick school, and yet his style is simple and quiet. He deals in an extravagant absurdity of plot. It is as though his whole story was a joke on the reader. One seems to see the man's own gentle, delightful personality behind the stories he has written. His death is so recent that it is hard to say how permanent a place many of his writings will occupy in American literature; but some of them are certain to survive. His name is almost as well known in England and Australia as in America, and his novels have nearly all been translated into foreign tongues.

PREPARED BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF THE MENTOR ASSOCIATION
ILLUSTRATION FOR THE MENTOR, VOL. 1, No. 20, SERIAL No. 20



MARK TWAIN

IF all of us realized our boyhood dreams, the world would be overcrowded with pirates, treasure hunters, and keepers of candy shops. One man who realized his boyhood ambition was our greatest American humorist, Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens). His boyhood was spent in a little Mississippi River town before the war, when river commerce was in its glory, and the Mississippi pilot was a man who ranked very little below the angels in the eyes of small boys. To be a pilot was the dream of small Sam Clemens. After working in a local printing office, and then as an expert compositor in St. Louis, New York, and other cities, he came back in 1861 to realize that early dream and be a pilot. The Civil War stopped his piloting, and after a brief service on the Confederate side he went to Nevada with his brother, who had been appointed territorial secretary. There he began the journalistic work that led to his later career as a writer.

Mark Twain, as everyone knows, was a pen name taken from the terminology of river steamboating. But everyone does not know that Clemens was the second writer to make use of it. It was first used by Captain Isaiah Sellers of the New Orleans *Picayune*.

Just as Mark Twain easily ranks superior to any other American humorous writer, so does he seem to have exceeded them all in the variety of his experiences and the extent of his wanderings into the odd corners of our country. When in Nevada he became a reporter and staff writer. It was there that he first learned his power of expression. For a time he tried mining, going to California and other gold mining districts. In San Francisco he tried his hand at journalism again, and took a trip to the Sandwich Islands, which he wrote up for a local paper. From 1869 to 1871 he was editor of a prominent Buffalo daily.

An experience that undoubtedly had great effect upon Mark Twain's personal character, bringing him friends in great number, who until that time had known him simply as a humorous writer of considerable ability, was the failure of his business. In 1884 he became owner, with others, of a publishing house. The business failed ten years later, with large liabilities. Mark Twain accepted responsibility for these debts, toured the world in a triumphant lecture tour, and paid them entire.

It is hard for us of the present day critics, living still in the memory of Mark Twain's delightful personality, with his mirth provoking after-dinner speeches still ringing in our ears, to say just how he will be measured—as a humorist or as a serious writer: he has written so much of both kinds—all good.

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